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Meghan Hughes Abstract:

Chapter 5 of *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, introduces the idea of tiering instruction. [Tiering instruction](#) is specific to each individual student. It is important to look at the lower information as foundational as opposed to looking at the lower information as poor quality. Tiering instruction is essential to allowing students to achieve his/her best work in any content area. Because students may struggle with particular content areas, it is especially important that all intelligences are recognized, and that a plan is made for all abilities in the classroom. The chapter defines tiering as, "primarily emphasizing the adjustments we make in assessments according to students' readiness levels, not interests or learner profiles" (56). This is where fostering positive relationships with all students comes in to play. Without having a solid relationship and understanding of all students, it will be virtually impossible for any teacher to incorporate tiering instruction in to the classroom successfully. It might be easier to include tiering into our every day classrooms, but it is far more difficult to include these steps into creating assessment. What is fair is not always what is equal, right?

Meghan Hughes Synthesis:

Cole described tiering as, "essentially a scale designed to best accommodate all levels of a students." The overall conclusion is that everyone agrees that tiering should be incorporated into every classroom. That would be too easy though, wouldn't it? Tyler B. wrote, "I can also consider how being too forward about the purpose of tiering in a classroom can lead to certain students feeling demeaned, and other students feeling nervous about displaying their aptitude in front of lesser prepared students." Matt also recognized this difficulty by saying, "a [challenge](#) presents itself however, because I will have to some how get all my students on the same page by the end of each lesson." It will be difficult to create lessons that will be effective for every student in every classroom situation. One aspect that I think a lot of people seemed to have missed, is the fact that there is another end of the spectrum in the idea of tiering instruction. Ashley L. noted this by writing, "tiering does not make things unfair for those students that already have mastered the skill or task." We often choose to focus too much on those students who are not at such an advanced level, and we do not do enough for the students who have acquired mastery of a certain topic. It is important to focus on students in all areas of tiering, as it is often difficult for every student to recognize his/her abilities, it is important for the teacher to understand the students at all ends of tiering instruction.

Cheyenne McCarthy

This chapter (5) of Wormeli's book, *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, is about tiering assessments. Tiering

assessments allows for differentiation based on skill level, which I find to be a good idea. By tiering assignments will allow me, as a teacher, to make adjustments to fit many components of a student's learning style; this includes the readiness of a student, but also demands (in the beginning) that every student will be proficient within a specific standard. This being said, the minimum expectation becomes the standard expectation. A teacher can't tier all facets of an assessment, but tiering one or two can be extremely beneficial for students who need it. There are many examples of tiering, a couple being learning menus, where the student has options in which they can choose a way that will allow them to achieve objectives or a learning contract, where the student and the teacher discuss guidelines and expectations and a means of achieving them. I believe that tiering assessments can be beneficial to my students as well as myself. There is nothing worse than you and your students both feeling discouraged, overwhelmed, and frustrated all at the same time. Tiering makes it easy for you and your student to work together to create almost an individualized plan, while still allowing the student to become competent and proficient in a given skill set by means of meeting standards. All in all, I find this to be a great idea.

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Ashley Godbout

Chapter 5 introduces the use of *tiering* in assessments. Tiering is based on the readiness of students and implies teachers need to increase the difficulty level of assessments for some students and decrease the difficulty level for other students. “Start tiering by expecting every student to demonstrate full proficiency with the standard, not something less” (56) is the first piece of advice the author gives first time “tierers”. This makes sense because it sets the minimum bar at grade-level standards. If we need to raise the bar to be more challenging then teachers can do so by going above the standards and create a more challenging assessment. The teacher is always keeping in mind the grade-level expectations when making an assessment less or more challenging rather than starting at the lower level and progressing to high levels. The author tells us that not every part of every lesson needs to be tiered, which was a relief to me. I was overwhelmed at first but he calms his audience by letting them know it’s okay for students to be doing the same work. We just have to be prepared to allow them more time instead of adjusting the difficulty. The chapter provides several ways to tier assignments that include: equalizers, learning contracts, learning menus, tic-tac-toe boards, cubing, summarization pyramids, RAFT’s and one-word summaries. Tiering makes teaching more effective and is an important part of differentiation. Challenging students is important because it keeps them engaged and interested. If we let them coast through, we will be failing them as teachers. Comparatively, if we are forcing remedial students to be producing at-grade-level work when they aren’t ready for it, we’re failing them as well. They’re going fall through the cracks. As teachers we have to be ready to compensate for our students so they can be individually successful.

Tyler Michaud

The fifth chapter of *Fair Isn’t Always Equal*, by Rick Wormeli, talked a lot about the use of “tiering” in the classroom. Simply put, tiering is the altering of expectations based on the readiness, interest, and learning profiles of the students. When creating tiered assessments it is important to start with the middle level, the level that meets the standard, from there you can create the higher or lower levels. The reason for this is that if you start too high or too low then the expectations for the other groups may be influenced; for example, if you create the higher level assessment first than you may be blinded to what the actual standard expects, thus creating an unfair exam; likewise, if you start too low than the others levels may not be challenged enough.

Tiering does intrigue me, especially for the more diverse classroom. Providing students the chance to exercise their creativity with my assignments will be more than welcome, assuming academically it does not interfere. The book introduces many ways to tier assignments, of them the RAFTS concept is particularly interesting. As a beach ball, I am a big fan of choices and providing options. However, a lot of students when given too many choices say they don't know where to begin, so this may be a structured way with which variety can be introduced. With that said, I think tiering can be really effective, but it is also something that teachers should implement cautiously. I have had teachers tier work before in a not-so-subtle manner and it led to the higher level kids feeling frustrated, and the lower level kids feeling belittled.

Russell Warren

Rick Wormeli is an adamant user of tiering, and this Chapter is a very informative, in-depth look at the practice. In all honesty, however, it slightly confused me at first, and seems rather daunting (This might just be because he used a mathematical example to begin with). While the process does seem to completely invest a teacher in the procedure, tiering is important and is just another step to differentiating the classroom.

In general, Wormeli describes tiering as “emphasizing the adjustments [teachers] make in assessments according to students’ readiness levels” (p. 56). While focusing on intelligences types is important, for assessment the students’ knowledge and readiness is more important. By focusing on those aspects, teachers can tier a test to allow the students to reach similar but different answers while they take in the same material, the teacher can assess their knowledge, and the students aren’t being dragged behind or pulled ahead. I really love the massive amounts of examples and prompts he’s giving us in FIAE. They’re detailed and explained thoroughly, and while I may not have a complete grasp on how to implement them now, having the book is fantastic utility for later on. William’s Creativity Taxonomy and RAFTs seem they most helpful and engaging towards the students, and I will definitely try to read closer in this section.

Christopher Vogel

This chapter's focus is discussed as a simple way of increasing complexity as well as managing student different levels of skill. The author cautions that we do not always need to tier subjects and that it is critical to focus on only one aspect of the learning task for the tiering to be effective. The tiering does not mean just "easy" or "hard" but an individualized task that can be adjusted step by step. The author brings up an interesting idea of including the student in what levels of the tier they want to work on and the parameters of that tier. The author also has the possibility of providing multiple formats or choices along with the tier to give the student more to work with. This could be helpful in the classroom as students feedback would give them quickly they are moving along the tier or how the tiering does not work for them to work up. Learning seems to be an ongoing task. The tiering would give the student a number of potential tasks to be completed. The student would then be able to pick and choose the projects or assignments they wanted to work on and complete by a certain date. The tiering seems to be a great idea for students who like to have what they need to complete in advance and can plan accordingly. I am cautious to see whether or not students who need continuous the tiering would find the tiering difficult to accomplish.

Meghan Hughes

Tiering is referred to as “how teachers adjust assignments and assessments according to students’ readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles.” It is important that students understand what it is that is expected of them; the students are expected to meet the standard with proficiency. This means that meeting the standard is the minimum performance. Expecting students to strive will either make or break them. I am unsure about how successful this idea would allow students to be. For students that strive under pressure, this method may help to produce their best and most successful pieces of work. On the other hand, students who fall short when it comes to performance, and succeed more when they are allowed time to complete an assignment, may fail under the pressure of the teachers expectations. We must understand how successful students are, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. Understanding these factors will allow the teacher to be able to base their assessment on what they already know about the student’s strength and weaknesses. Increasing the complexity of an assignment may not always be in the best interest of all students. There should be ways to adjust assignments to be able to benefit all students. It is our job as educators to be able to make decisions that will allow for students to be

successful with the progress of their work. Understanding these factors will allow for the teacher to be able to better evaluate the progress of each individual student. Students need to have strong relationships with their teachers if they are going to be able to understand the methods and ideologies of their teachers.

Matt Potter

Chapter five chooses to discuss tiering assessments. As teachers we must adjust our curriculums and assessments in ways that create student success. If we chose not to adjust we will have students fall off the cliff. Take an exchange student for example; coming into an English speaking school, and their dominant language is Spanish. How are they expected to achieve the same levels as kids who have spoke English all their lives? They simply can't, and this is why we must constantly adjust as teachers. This is why tiering is important, as it helps create success for our students. Tiering tends to begin with either increasing or decreasing the workload we give our students, as well as the complexity of our lessons. I as a teacher believe in giving light workloads, and heavy work loads at the appropriate. This I feel is good "tier" practice as a teacher, because it doesn't burn out, or bore students.

As a teacher I will always adapt to the abilities of my students. All students have different needs and abilities, and as a teacher I will try to mold my curriculum to each student. A challenge presents itself however, because I will have to some how get all my students on the same page by the end of each lesson. I will do this by summing up a topic or unit with activities that will all transform into a final understanding for all my students. All in all I will do my best to work with each students needs, and provide each student with fair and equal assessment.

Michael Diffin

The fifth chapter in FIAE is about the use of tiering in assignments. Tiering is used when there is a need for differentiation in the classroom and the students all need to meet the same standards at a base level but for the students who either need more or less there is an alternate path or alternate options. To start tiering the first step is for all the students to meet the standard at the minimum point. There should never be a system when they are first trying to reach something under the minimum. The next part of tiering is the breakdown of the skills being learned. There are always skills associated with the material and the students should learn how to utilize these skill as a result of learning the material. The leveling should also never be predetermined, you should be working with the students you have not the results of students you have taught in the past. It is also important to not tier all aspects of lessons and let students do the same work as other students some of the time.

Ashley Libby

This chapter defines tiering as "primarily emphasizing the adjustments we make in assessments according to students' readiness levels, not interests or learner profiles." (56) To start tiering then teachers must first have high expectations for the students and must expect them to be able to demonstrate proficiency. It's easier to start at the correct level task and raise the challenge then to start will low expectations. It is also helpful if teachers list out every skill or information that the students need to use in order to meet the needs of the task. There should not be any low, medium or high tiers because instead teachers should be only responding to those specific groups that are struggling. Tiering does not mean changing every part of

the task but just specific parts because most of the times, struggling students can still complete the other parts without much problem. There are many ways to increase and decrease the complexity of an assignment and the chapters gives a detailed list to choose from. The book gives many examples on how to tier lessons that include; learning contracts/menus, tic-tac-toe boards, cubing, summarization pyramids, RAFT(S), and one-word summaries. Tiering does not make things unfair for those students that already have mastered the skill or task. It does not baby those students that are still having trouble. It gives those advanced students to do an assignment that will challenge them and further their understanding. It gives those struggling students a chance to achieve the required task in a different manner than their fellow classmates.

Cole Phillips

In chapter five of *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, Wormeli focuses on the concept of 'tiering.' Essentially a scale designed to best accommodate all levels of a students, Rick Wormeli offers a cautionary message, continually reaffirming that tiers are not always necessary, and can discourage concepts of traditional learning. The very idea of the creation of a tiered system can either overwhelmingly encourage or discourage students who get placed in a manner which they feel is inappropriate for themselves and their learning styles, but which is felt appropriate by those designing the system and its placements. While it is, and will remain, a system put in place to encourage growth, remediation, extension, and learning at a pace consistent with what an individual student has shown that he or she is capable of, it is controversial, and is, at times, a point of contention for proponents of equality in the classroom and for those who seek equal opportunity for the future. It is sometimes an unfortunate idea that a person's future is determined by placement in the classroom, but it is a reality and, in that sense, maybe it is, indeed, appropriate to categorize students by their abilities in order to help them prepare, as best as possible, for their individual futures. Whether right, wrong, or unknown either way, the system of tiering exists and its implementation is best done, as Wormeli notes, with care and attention to its degree of necessity.

Tyler Brown

The idea of "tiering" instruction as a form of differentiation is interesting to me. I can see the positives that come out of implementing this effectively, but I can also consider how being too forward about the purpose of tiering in a classroom can lead to certain students feeling demeaned, and other students feeling nervous about displaying their aptitude in front of lesser prepared students. All in all though, I can see how using this form of differentiation can lead to a wider range of success that is inclusive of all sets of abilities and readiness levels. Providing multiple words for students to choose from in order to trigger their critical thinking process on a given topic helps accelerate their ideas. I remember dreading when prompts were given that included only one or two topics to base your writing on and I disliked the only options available.

Devin Boilard

Chapter 5: *Tiering Assessments*

Tiering, the act of supplying tasks that meet a common goal but in a range of complexity, addresses the reality of variation in student ability within a class. The broad reaching's of tiering allow for a teacher to implement its practice to meet the needs of both struggling learners as well as those deemed gifted and talented. Due to this, tiering in the classroom allows for a teacher to fully challenge all students to the point of successful growth, limiting the possibilities for stagnation, frustration, or boredom to occur. In Chapter 5 of *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, author Rick Wormeli is insistent to point out that the base level of tiering should always be to express proficiency with the standard, stating that otherwise "we tend to distort our expectations for the on-grade-level performance, losing site of the learning outcomes or benchmarks." How tiering takes place and to what amount is at full disclosure to the teacher. A great example of its implementation in the classroom, and one that I am sure to incorporate into my lessons plans involves the use of [RAFT](#). Tiering can easily be managed using RAFT formatted assignments, each category allowing you to easily increase complexity by altering a single variable. Additionally the multiple pairing of options within the RAFT format allows for subtle increases in difficulty creating multiple tiers within one assignment.

While reading this chapter I reflected on the classes I work with during my in-field experience, as I look back on the assignments for each of these classes I can recall no examples of tiering or variation of any sort with each assignment. I found this rather curious knowing the youth of my mentor and his constant new-age approach to teaching. I stepped back to look at the big picture and in doing so found the glitch. Tracking. Tiering and tracking serve to meet the same goals, the scale in which they do varying. At Mt. B, where I teach, the school's courses are heavily tracked; U.S. History is offered in 4+ class variations. My mentor does not need to implement tiering because his classes are already highly segregated by ability. As a future teacher I wonder if the school I work at will rely on tracking or if one day I might need to incorporate these methods into my lesson plans.
